

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AID-05 IO-10 /079 W
----- 095520

R 060842Z AUG 75

FM AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1420

INFO AMEMBASY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY ACCRA

AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

AMEMBASSY COTONOU

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY LOME

AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

AMEMBASSY CONAKRY

AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L NIAMEY 3106

ABIDJAN FOR AMBASSADOR HECK

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, NG

SUBJECT: NIGER INDEPENDENCE DAY: POLITICAL CLEMENCY AND APPRE-
HENSION ABOUT FOOD

1. PRESIDENT KOUNTCHE'S INDEPENDENCE DAY MESSAGE
AUGUST 3 ANNOUNCED RELEASE FROM PRISON OF 5 MINISTERS OF
FORMER DIORI REGIME. THOSE INCLUDED ARE: AMADOU SOUNA,
HAROUNA BEM BELLO, AMADOU ISSAKA, GARBA KATAMBE AND AMADOU
MOSSI. PRESIDENT ALSO ANNOUNCED MORE "FLEXIBILITY" WOULD
BE INTRODUCED CONCERNING FORMER ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT BOUBOU
HAMA WHO WILL APPARENTLY REMAIN IN DETENTION.

2. OTHERWISE NIGER'S 15TH ANNIVERSARY PASSED ALMOST
PERFUNCTORY WAY WITH PRESIDENT KOUNTCHE'S PARTICIPATION
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LIMITED TO A TREE PLANTING CEREMONY AND A SOBER

CALL FOR BELT TIGHTENING AND HARD WORK BETWEEN

NOW AND THE TIME FALL HARVEST COMES IN. MAIN THRUST OF PRESIDENT'S SPEECH WAS DIRECTED AT FARMERS, UNDERLINING GOVERNMENT'S AWARENESS OF PRECARIOUS FOOD SUPPLY OUTLOOK, CONVEYING REASSURANCES GOVERNMENT DOING ALL IT CAN IN WAY OF STABILIZING PRICES AND ELICITING FOREIGN ASSISTANCE BUT NOT RPT NOT HOLDING OUT HOPES FOR DRAMATIC IMPROVEMENT WHEN THE HARVEST COMES IN. PRESIDENT SAID THAT AT BEST SEVERAL GOOD CROP YEARS WOULD BE NEEDED BEFORE NIGER IS OUT OF THE TUNNEL AND THAT THIS RESULT CAN BE ACHIEVED ONLY AFTER BASIC CHANGES HAVE PUT AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION ON A FIRMER FOOTING.

3. ALL THIS IS IN ACCORD WITH RECENT INDICATIONS THAT TOP LEVELS OF GON ARE INCREASINGLY APPREHENSIVE ABOUT FOOD SITUATION THIS YEAR AND ARE DISCREETLY PREPARING POPULATION FOR POSSIBLE BAD NEWS IN THE MONTHS JUST AHEAD. ON POLITICAL SIDE, KOUNTCHE ALLUDED IN LOW KEY TO ARRESTS ANNOUNCED NIGHT BEFORE OF VICE PRESIDENT SANI SIDO AND ALLEGED CO-CONSPIRATORS BUT GAVE NO FURTHER DETAILS. WHILE RELEASE OF DIORI REGIME FIGURES MAY BE INTENDED TO COUNTERBALANCE THIS MOVE, WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE OF ACTUAL LINKAGE SO FAR. SEEMS JUST AS LIKELY THAT GESTURE OF CLEMENCY WAS PLANNED WELL IN ADVANCE TO COINCIDE WITH AUGUST 3 ANNIVERSARY AND WAS NOT RPT NOT INTENDED AS A SPECIFIC ANTIDOTE TO REMOVAL OF SANI SIDO FROM SCENE. STILL, RELEASE OF DIORI REGIME FIGURES BESPEAKS RELAXATION AND SELF-CONFIDENCE PART OF GON WHICH CLEARLY AT THIS JUNCTURE IS IMAGE KOUNTCHE FEELS IT IMPORTANT TO CONVEY. DAVISON

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: INDEPENDENCE CELEBRATIONS, FOOD ASSISTANCE, SPEECHES, PRISONERS RELEASE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 06 AUG 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: RowellE0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975NIAMEY03106
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750271-0164
From: NIAMEY
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750877/aaaacqjm.tel
Line Count: 91
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: RowellE0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 22 MAY 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <22 MAY 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <03 OCT 2003 by RowellE0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: NIGER INDEPENDENCE DAY: POLITICAL CLEMENCY AND APPRE- HENSION ABOUT FOOD
TAGS: PINS, NG, (KOUNTCHE, SEYNI), (ISSAKA, AMADOU), (KATAMBE, GARBA), (SOUNA, AMADOU), (BELLO, HAROUNA BEM)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006